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Introduction To The Old Religion

Lesson 5

Anon

1. The Meaning Of Ritual In Working Magic
    1. The Need to Change the Wiring in our Brains.
        1. Learning to work magic requires that a certain amout of neurological re-patterning of our brains takes place.
            1. To be effective, we have to change the way we use our brains.
                1. Magic requires the development and integration of the right hemisphere way of thinking with the left hemisphere way of thinking.
                    1. The spacial, intuitive and holistic patterns of awareness that characterize the right hemisphere modes of consciousness must be able to communicate and work in harmony with the verbal, analytical and linear patterns of awareness so characteristic of the left hemisphere.
                    2. A person's growth, creativity and personality is deeply influenced during this process and it eventually leads to a person who is truly functional as a whole person.
    2. The language of magic is expressed in symbols and images.
        1. Images bridge the gap between the verbal and non-verbal modes of awareness.
            1. Symbols and images implant certain ideas in Younger Self who passes them on to High Self.
                1. By allowing the critical and analytical functions of Talking Self to relax, Younger Self may respond fully and emotionally to what happens during your magical workings.
                    1. Ritual, which is defined as "a specific set of images and symbols attached to certain actions", allows us to deliberately alter our states of consciousness so that we may perform works of magic.
        2. All humans relate to their environment through symbols and rituals.
            1. Except during rare occasions, we do not experience our environment directly.

1. Our left hemisphere patterning awareness developed so we could safely ignore anything in our environment which was not potentially dangerous.
    1. A direct benefit of this survival tactic was the ability to concentrate, which allowed us to examine the world around us and led to experimentation.
    2. Experimentation led to better ways of doing things, such as making tools, and technology was born. It has served as a goad and a goal since then.
2. The way our left hemisphere works is fascinating
    1. Working as a filter of all the stimuli coming into the various senses of a human, the left hemisphere examines everything closely and then files the new sensory data away as images, tastes, smells, etc. where it stays in memory.
        1. The majority of this activity occurs when we are young and enchanted with the world around us.
        2. Maturity is usually judged by the degree to which your enthusiasm for examining the world around you has diminished.
        3. Ironically, when you become too mature, you withdraw from the world around you and lose interest, this is usually marked by a tendency to live in your memories instead of the present. This condition is called old age and people who give in to living in the past are called senile.
        4. Those of us who never lose our sense of wonder toward all the world has to offer are often accused of having never 'grown up' or if, we have managed to live long enough, to be going through our 'second childhood.'
    2. As we approach something in our normal everyday activities we receive an image from our eyes and a part of our brain searches through our memory for an image that matches the one at which we are looking.
        1. If there is already an image on file, even if it is not a perfect match, the image on file is fed to that part of our brain which 'sees' what we are approaching.
        2. In this instance, assuming that we have not associated the image in memory with something dangerous, we will walk past the object without paying it any attention or actually seeing the object.
        3. If there is not an image on file we will stop and examine the new object as if we were seeing it for the first time, which we are.
        4. Then having classified and categorized it, we then file it away in our memory for future reference and continue on our way, oblivious to our surroundings.
    3. This behavior allows us to concentrate on more abstract things than worrying if our favorite armchair is going to have us for brunch.
        1. An extension of this type of behavior is the formation of habits. Habits are ways of interacting with our environment, based on assumptions made using our stored images and experiences as a true picture of reality.
        2. In effect, habits are pre-programmed responses to everyday occurrences.
    4. A little known fact relating to habits is that habits do fulfill a psychological need.
        1. And you cannot break a habit, you can only replace it with another that meets that same psychological need.

2. Ritual Etiquette
    1. The Ritual Bath
        1. Before performing a ritual it is necessary to prepare yourself for the work ahead.
            1. A ritual bath washes away the dirt and grime of the everyday world along with the tensions of the mundane world
                1. Draw a hot bath and add some essence, oils or perfume that makes you feel good.

    1. If you have studied the uses of oils and scents in magic, you might want to tune your additives to the work to be done.
2. Turn off all the lights and light a single white taper.
    1. Make sure that it is in a candle holder that will handle it without you worrying about it setting fire to anything or spilling wax where you do not want it. Votive candles and holders work very well for this.
3. Light a stick of incense or place some on a glowing coal in a censer that you can pick up.
4. Place some sea salt in a white dish or small bowl.
    1. Being so close to the sea (southern California) it is easy to collect sea salt by just taking some ocean water home and letting it evaporate in the direct sunlight until all that is left is the salt crystals.
    2. If you cannot get sea salt, you might want to use some iodized or rock salt from the market. It is essentially the same thing but personally I like the idea of making or collecting my own salt.
5. You should have some purified water in a cup or vial.
    1. Fresh spring water or stream water is ideal but most of us living in the desert have to make due with bottled water from the store.
    2. Rain water, collected, strained, and kept in glass bottles is a good substitute.
    3. It is definitely preferred that you not use tap water because of the additives in it.

2. The following is a very simple ritual for consecrating the ritual bath.
    1. Lock the doors and unplug the phone.
        1. This is to ensure that you are not disturbed.
    2. Once the bath is drawn and any oils have been added to it as desired, take the candle and make three slow passes over the water as you say the following evocation.
        1. "By this creature of fire do I purify this ritual bath. May all impurities flee before its light."
        2. Set the candle down so that it is out of the way but still sheds light on your work.
    3. Take up the dish of salt and, sprinkling three pinches of the salt into the water say the following.
        1. "By this creature of earth do I purify this ritual bath. All impure creatures may not approach it."
    4. Set the dish of salt aside and pick up the incense or censer and make three passes over the water as you say the following evocation.
        1. "By this creature of Air do I purify this ritual bath. May my hopes and aspirations rise upon the smoke to be carried by the winds to the Lady."
    5. Set the incense aside and pick up the water. Pour the water into the bath. You may form patterns that appeal to you if you like. Say the following.
        1. "By this creature of water do I purify this ritual bath. May this bath contain the Waters of Life that spring forth from the Heart of the Mother."
    6. Settle into the bath and soak until the water starts to get too cold to stay in or until you have fully relaxed and left the tensions of the world behind, which ever comes first.
        1. This is a good time to meditate on the work you wish to do.
    7. Dry off with a freshly cleaned white towel, that has been allowed to dry in the sunlight if possible.

1. Again, the color of the towel can be coordinated with the work you intend to do. I prefer large bath sheets that I can wrap around myself until I am ready to dress.
8. Apply any anointing oils that you plan to wear and dress in fresh clean clothes, or in robes if you do not have to travel to your working site.
3. There are provisions made for 'emergency' ritual baths in the event that you cannot take a real bath.
    1. These usually involve dousing yourself with specially prepared solutions that serve the purpose.
        1. These are not favored as they do not allow any time for relaxation and meditation.
        2. Any good 'formulary' should have the recipe for instant ritual bath solutions.

2. Handling Ritual Tools
    1. A Witch's tools are more personal than her toothbrush.
        1. Generally, it is considered extremely bad form to handle another persons tools without prior permission.
            1. Some witches charge their tools so that others who handle them incorrectly can receive a nasty jolt of psychic power to teach them to keep their hands to themselves. Personally, I do not approve of this practice as it may result in harming someone too innocent to know that they should not be handling the tools.
    2. Some Covens maintain ritual tools that they only allow their own members to handle.
        1. If you are a guest, it is always best to avoid offending anyone by not handling anything unless it is specifically offered to you.

3. Entering and Leaving the Circle
    1. A witch's magic circle is designed to keep the power raised within it contained and concentrated.
        1. Leaving and entering the circle during the ritual tends to weaken it and for this reason it is not encouraged.
            1. Animals and small children can pass through the barrier of the circle because they live in a 'state of grace' under the protection of the Goddess.
                1. Even so, animals and children should be kept out of the ritual area unless they are a specific part of the ritual because they are distracting.
        2. When it cannot be helped, the High Priestess will open, or 'cut' a door in the circle so that people who need to, can pass into or out of it.
            1. Naturally, after the person has passed through the High Priestess will set a guard or close (seal) the circle.
        3. Walking across the barriers of the circle is considered to be extremely disrespectful and only someone who wants to test the patience of the High Priestess will do it knowingly.

4. Movement Within the Circle
    1. Movement within the circle is in accordance to the order found in nature.
        1. As you face South you can track the Sun and Moon from your Left to your Right.
            1. This is the order of how we move in the circle, from side to side when doing things such as lighting candles, etc.
        2. Continuing the movement from the West to the North and back to the East we have inscribed a circle in a clockwise or Deosil (for 'as the sun travels') motion.
            1. Deosil is the direction the Circle is cast in, and all circular movement within the Circle should be in a clockwise direction.
                1. There are times when we would move in a counter clockwise direction but that would be only under the specific directions of the High Priestess and even then only after explaining why we were doing it.

2. The general rule is "Always move in a clockwise direction."
2. Each Coven maintains its own practices for giving salutes during invocations, evocations and blessings.
    1. Invoking and banishing pentagrams are also used in setting up the Circle and during other rituals acts.
        1. Imitating the others in the group is a 'safe' way to avoid any social blunders.
            1. When in doubt, do not do anything that you feel uncomfortable about.
3. Creating Meaningful Rituals.
    1. Creating Sacred Space
        1. We define a new space and a new time whenever we cast a Circle in the Craft to begin a ritual.
            1. The Circle exists outside the boundaries of ordinary space and time. We say it is between the worlds of the seen and the unseen.
                1. It is a space in which alternate realities meet, in which the past and future are open to us.
            2. Casting the Circle is an enacted meditation.
                1. We create an energy form which serves as a boundary that limits and contains the movement of subtle forces.
                    1. In group work, it is usually the High Priestess or her assistant who casts the Circle.
        2. Casting the Circle is the formal beginning of the ritual.
            1. It is the complex 'cue' that tells us to switch our awareness into a deeper mode.
                1. In ritual, we 'suspend disbelief' just as we do when we are watching a play or reading fiction.
        3. In the permanent stone circles of the Megalithic era, where rituals were enacted for hundreds of years, great reservoirs of power were built up.
            1. There was no need to draw out the circle as we do today, because the stones defined the sacred space.
                1. Casting a temporary circle as we do today probably began during the time of persecution when tearing down stone circles was a popular sport of christian mobs.
                    1. To further the 'destruction' of our circles, the church ordered that christian churches be erected over the old sacred spots in the countryside.
    2. Evoking The Guardians of the Watchtowers
        1. The concept of the quartered circle is basic to the craft, as it is to many cultures and religions.
            1. The four directions each correspond to and resonate with a quality of the self, to an Element, a time of day and year, to tools of the craft, symbolic animals and forms of personal power.
                1. These correspondences are usually set down in a table similar to the one in the back of The Spiral Dance and provide the basis for visualizations throughout the ritual.
                    1. Constant visualizations of these connections create deep internal links, so much so that physical actions during ritual can trigger the desired inner states.
        2. The Guardians of the Watchtowers are energy forms.
            1. They are the Spirits or Wraiths of the four Elements.
                1. They bring the elemental energy of Earth, Air, Fire, and Water into the circle to augment our human power.
                    1. The vortex of power created when we evoke the four Quarters guards the circle from intrusions and draws in the higher powers of the Goddess and

God.

3. Each Movement in a Ritual has Meaning
    1. When we move deosil or sunwise we follow the direction the sun appears to move in, and draw in power.
        1. Deosil is the direction of increase, of fortune favour and blessing.
            1. When we move widdershins, or counter clockwise, we move against the path of the sun.
                1. This direction is used for decrease or banishing.
4. Cosmic Power Times
    1. Some traditions assign one of the four seasons to each of the four Elements.
        1. When this is done, they will orient their altar to face that quarter which represents the season that is being honored.
            1. Tthe East is associated with Air and the Spring, South is associated with Fire and Summer, West with Water and the Autumn and the North with Earth and Winter.
    2. Depending on the time of day or night, some traditions encourage facing towards one of the four directions to draw power and perform magic appropriate to the Element used.
        1. From sunrise to noon you should face East, Noon until sunset face South, sunset to midnight face West and midnight to sunrise face North.
5. Raising the Cone of Power
    1. Energy is raised in coven rituals and most often molded into the form of a Cone.
        1. This is called the Cone of Power. The base of the cone is the circle of coveners; its apex can focus on an individual, an object, or a collectively visualized image.
            1. At times the cone is allowed to rise and fall naturally without being sent anywhere.
                1. At these times the cone is used to renew the coveners personal power.
            2. It may also be sent off in a burst of Force, directed by one person who may be a part of the circle or may stand in the center serving as the focal point.
        2. Rhythmical drumming, hand claps and dance movements may all be used to raise the Cone of Power.

4. Format Of A Typical Ritual
    1. Creating Sacred Space
        1. The High Priestess or assistant casts the circle.
            1. The circle can be marked out by stones, chalk, salt or any other natural material.
                1. No one is allowed to enter the circle until it has been properly cast.
                    1. Once cast, other members of the ritual enter the circle through a pre-arranged 'door' in the circle. Usually in the north.
    2. Evoking the Guardians of the Watchtowers
        1. The guardians are evoked, one at a time and welcomed.
            1. The circle can be purified by that Element assigned to each Guardian, as the Guardian is evoked or later, after all the Guardians have been evoked.
    3. Invoking the Goddess and the God
        1. Many traditions invoke the Goddess in all their rituals.
            1. Some invoke the Goddess and God at Sabbats and the Goddess only at Esbats.
                1. Some traditions invoke either the Goddess or the God, in accordance with the Season.
    4. Feasting
        1. The ritual feast can consist of eating a simple meal of ritual cakes and wine or a full blown feast in honor of the Goddess and God and the season.
            1. It is traditional to pour a libation from the chalice out onto the ground 'for the Goddess' before anyone else has a drink.

1. Some traditions have a modest meal of cakes and wine and then, after the circle is over, settle down for some serious feasting.

5. Working Magic/Raising the Cone
    1. Any magical work or healing is usually done at this time.
6. Grounding of the Cone of Power
    1. Some traditions perform a ritual to rejuvenate the Earth Mother by grounding any unused energy raised during the formation of the Cone of Power.
7. Thanking the Goddess and/or the God
    1. A formal declaration of thanks for attending the rites and for any special favors granted.
8. Thanking and releasing the Guardians
    1. A formal thanking and leave taking of the Guardians.
9. Closing the circle
    1. Either the circle will be banished so that it cannot be discovered or a maintenance spell will be placed upon it to allow it to retain and grow in power.

End Of Lesson 5

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